



Ohio Statewide

Family Engagement Center

**MIDDLE
GROUND**

at The Ohio State University

Texting to Trust: Collaborative Communication Between Middle School Staff and Families

Hadley F. Bachman,

PhD Candidate and Family Engagement Researcher

Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center
Center on Education and Training for Employment
The Ohio State University



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Context

- Midwest U.S. urban charter middle school
- 220 students in grades 5–8
 - 34% White, 54% African American, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% Multiracial, 4% Hispanic
 - 28% of students have a disability
 - 64% of students are economically disadvantaged
- 18 teachers, 76 students, and 36 parents and caregivers took surveys
- All parents and caregivers of the students of participating teachers received messages



Results



- **Students**

- Parents encouraged more self-expression
- More frequent family talks about future plans
- Decreased home-school dissonance
- Increased sense of belonging at school



- **Teachers**

- Increased confidence promoting academic engagement with students
- Increased efficacy for assisting parents in academic conversations with students
- Increased sense of trust
- Messages were not a time burden



- **Parents and Caregivers**

- Increased sense that school kept them informed
- Increased trust in school staff
- Overall increase in confidence in teaching children to enjoy school
- Preferred brief messages





Takeaways

- Tailor practices for middle school students and their families.
- Prioritize relationship building grounded in trust.
- Promote two-way communication through consistent and straightforward systems.
- Prioritize funding for family engagement professional learning.



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Resources

MIDDLE GROUND

Family engagement for success in the middle grades

<https://go.osu.edu/middleground>



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Partnering with Families for the Middle School Transition

Research-based Strategies for Middle-Level Educators

Developed by the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center
Hadley F. Bachman, Eric M. Anderman, Brett E. Zyromski, and Barbara J. Boone

Ohio Statewide **Family Engagement Center**
News and Guidance at The Ohio State University

Tailoring Family Engagement For the Middle School Years

Issue 16 | February 3, 2021

Tailoring Family Engagement Practices for the Middle School Years

"Parental involvement (during middle school) that creates an understanding about the progress, goals, and meaning of academic performance; communicates expectations about involvement; and provides strategies that students can effectively use (i.e., academic goal setting) has the strongest positive relation with achievement." —Wright & Ryan, 2000, p. 738

What makes family engagement at the middle school level unique? Early adolescents are growing and changing, and the school context is, in many ways, more complex for families to navigate. The Middle Ground Project at the Ohio Statewide Family Engagement Center seeks to bring research to reality through professional learning opportunities, practical strategies for teachers, and helpful tips for families so that all middle schoolers can benefit from strong family-school partnerships.

Issue 16, February 3, 2021

Middle School Transition Tip #1

Support your middle schooler's growing independence.

I have confidence you can do this.

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at The Ohio State University

Launching Your Middle Schooler to Success

Support your middle schooler's growing independence.

- Let your middle schooler have a say in family decisions.
- Middle schoolers have opinions! Be open to listening to them.
- Middle schoolers need rules, but they also have enough experience to help set them.

Encourage a growth mindset.

- Has your middle schooler worked hard on a school assignment? Value effort over results.
- Find mistakes as an opportunity for learning. If everything is easy, there is no growth.
- Encourage your middle schooler to solve problems on their own.

Teach your middle schooler how to be a strong student.

- Education is real world. Connect schoolwork to current events and future goals.
- Talk about learning/study strategies like breaking up tasks and time management.
- What about the Backpack Book Role? Check in with your middle schooler on missing work.
- Everyone needs help sometimes. Tell your middle schooler it's okay to speak up.

Stay positive during homework time.

- Homework can be tough on everyone other than you. Keep the mood fun and loving.
- Show that you care. Listen for the root of the problem and help them focus on solutions.
- Don't wait until frustration is at its full. Talk about how to calm down when things get tough.

Be aware without being too noisy.

- Ask for information about activities and unstructured time.
- Show your middle schooler that they can trust you. You'll be more likely to be kept in the loop.
- Back news? When your middle schooler opens up to you, try not to react negatively.

Build structure together.

- Rules, middle schoolers still need them. The best rules are easy to understand and consistent.
- Rules will sometimes be broken. Work together to create consequences that make sense.
- What's the point? Talk about why the rules are important for your middle schooler.

Provide emotional support.

- Be available in times of stress to give security and comfort.
- Be a cheerleader. Tell your middle schooler how great they are!
- It's okay to be a little noisy. Middle schoolers aren't like us!
- Your middle schooler is growing up fast! Notice and celebrate all the changes.

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Texting: A simple path to building trust

Hadley F. Bachman, Elise C. Allen, Eric M. Anderman, Barbara J. Boone, Thomas J. Capretta, Patrick D. Cunningham, August T. Masonheimer, and Brett Zyromski
March 28, 2022

Brief texts can help schools build a stronger partnership with parents of middle school students.

